

**Folk and Minor Art in India**  
**Prof. Shatarupa Thakurta Roy**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur**

**Lecture – 28**  
**Case study-1: Gond Art**

Hello, today I will be talking about the first case study of the course Folk and Minor Art in India, which will be about Gond art tradition of Madhya Pradesh. The Gonds are amongst the largest tribe tribes in central India, which number around 4 million though predominantly centered in Madhya Pradesh. They are also present in significant numbers in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and also Odessa.

The word Gond comes from the Dravidian expression Kond, which means the green mountain. The recorded history of the Gond people goes back 1400 years, but considering that they enabled the areas where rock paintings date back to the visual ethnic era their antiserum probably date back even further and many of the Gond customs eco that of them Mesolithic and obvious example of this is the custom of decorating the walls of their houses an activity, which may have its origins in the cave dwelling traditions of our ancestors.

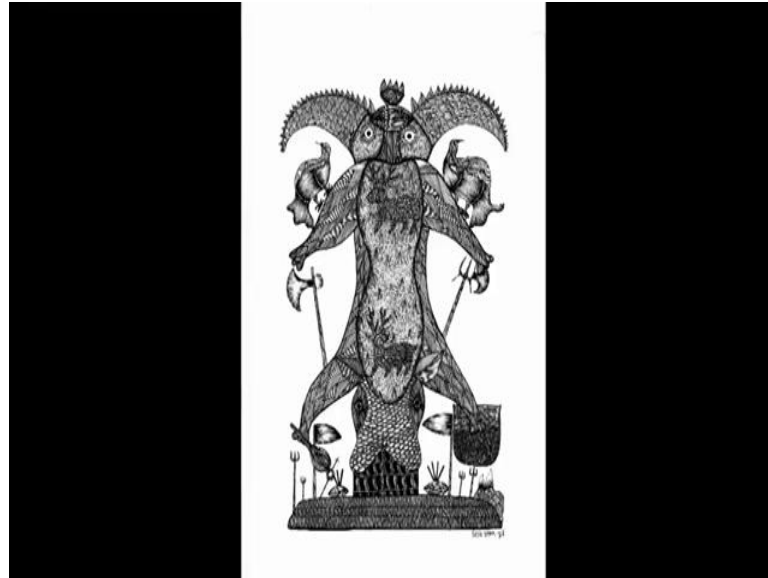
(Refer Slide Time: 01:44)



The work of Gond art is rooted in their folk tales and culture and thus story telling becomes a strong element of every painting the Gonds paint their walls with vibrant

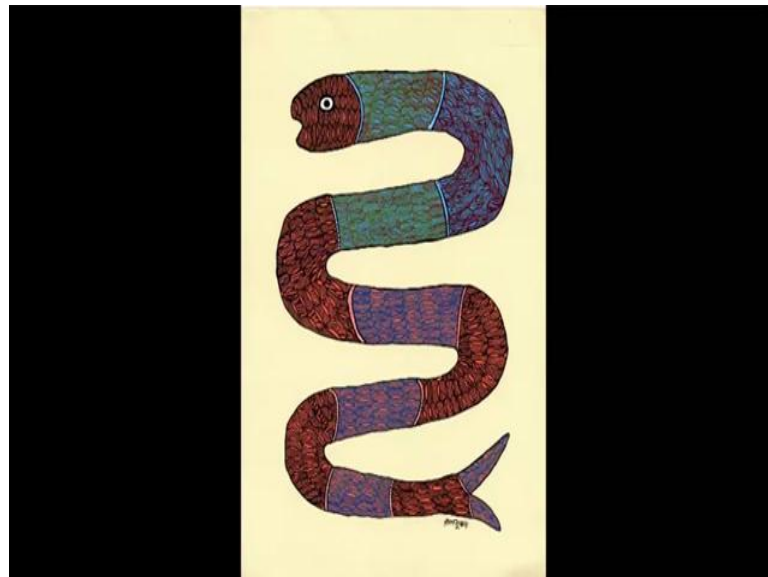
depictions of local flora fauna and Gods such as Marahi Devi and Fulvari Devi and Bagasur.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:00)



Needless to say, these are all different incarnations of God of Hindu pantheon.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:07)



Traditionally, these painting are made in festive vocation such as Karva Chauth, Deepavali, Holi, Nag Panchami and other festive occasions.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:21)



They depict various celebrations rituals and man's relationship with nature. The artist use natural colors derived from charcoal colored soil plants leaves and cow dung.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:44)



This mystical art form is created by putting together dots and lines and the imaginative use of the line impart the sense of movement to the still images the paintings are an often as a worship of nature, and also mode of seeking protections and warding off evil. Today, many talented Gond artists work including that of Ram Singh Urveti can be seen on canvases in art galleries internationally.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:18)



And one of the distinctive elements is the use of signature patterns that are use to infill the large forms on the canvas a certain sense of balance.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:40)



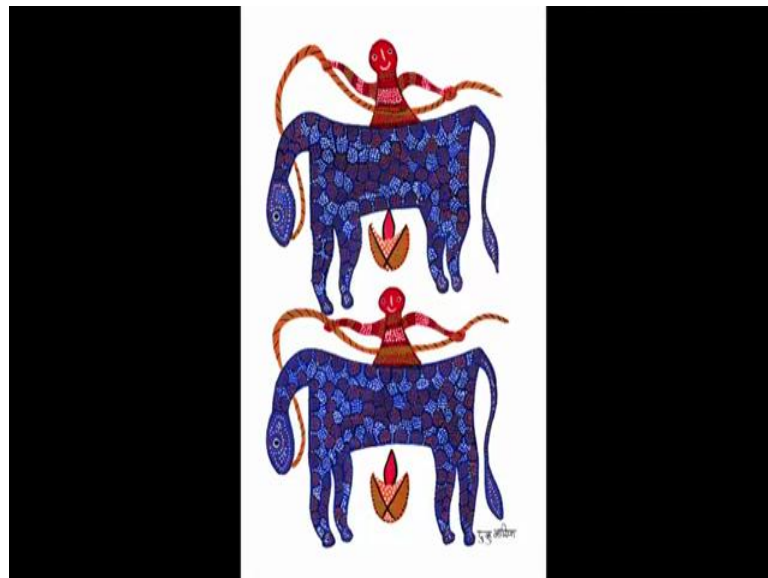
And symmetric can be observed in the patterns used such as the spiral forms along the trees leaves animals and human figures painted in several bright colors.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:44)



The placement of motives showcasing village life and the blending of human figures with rituals and nature depicts the Gonds in heritage. Skills and creativity in the eyes of the Gond artist everything is sacred and intimately connected to nature thus the unique oral narrative tradition of the Gonds is reflected in their paintings as well.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:15)



The work of these artists is rooted in their folk tales and culture and thus story telling is a very important element of every painting. However, every artist today has a personal style and has developed a specific language within these narratives creating a richness of

esthetic forms and styles. So, this was about Gond art in general. In the second part of this lecture I will talk about, it will be useful to look at the work of a particular artist Mr. Ram Singh Urveti, who is from Patangad village in Madhya Pradesh. Ram Singh Urveti along with Jangarh Singh Shyam is one of the historical figures in contemporary Indian travel art encouraged by Jagadish Swaminathan.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:22)



He was one of the first to go from ephemeral art to painting on canvas. At the beginning of 1980s his paintings celebrate the spirit of its tribe.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:38)



Gond tribe does not have a single God or a single group of Gods. They have different, for different casts and sub groups.

So, Ram Singh Urveti's clan worships Badadev or Thakurdev, which is another incarnation of Lord Shiva, who is worshiped all over the tribe. Shiva is their gram Devtha. He has a very different way of approaching and empty canvas as he does not render drawings first in pencil.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:12)



He straight away uses pens on white or colored backgrounds and even though he has travelled far and wide, he hardly uses any external influences or symbolisms.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:26)



And only uses his repeated motives of flowers trees animals and birds and characteristically uses God's wearing only, jewelry we can frequently see Badadev, animals such as spiders, water life such as tortoise and crabs in his canvas and wall art.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:54)



A tree is in omnipresent element in his paintings. As according to him, Gods need a ground to sit or work upon and a background to showcase their powers on and trees fulfill that purpose in the best manner, the subject that he paints are informal evanescent in nature. They belong to the spirit world cattle totems men shamans offering jars snakes



and intertwining trees are transformed and muted into improbable like those in dreams and folk tales.

The absence of any, to outline the shapes except for the eyes, strengthen this effect Ram Singh's drawing posses in enigmatic force, he focuses his interest on the tree trunks in order to evokes it in par. The trunk is a concentration of energy and like the mountains seems in destructible in this way the spirits often take on this squared shape of that part of the tree. They take up the space on the canvas in an imposing manner structuring and organizing it the patterns and their placements within the space have the simplicity and the graphic efficiency of a safe. These spontaneous elevations similar to the line growing on termite mounds to erect stones or more precisely to a tree trunk gives his canvases, the heraldic look of animistic flags. The visual forth rightness reinforce by the rounded shapes also evoke another artistic movement and graffiti or wall art in modern times mysteriously for reasons are known Gond art also has many similarities with Australian aberrational art.

Now, in the last part of the lecture I will talk about his painting, the birth of existence which he made in 3 days when he was here in IIT, Kanpur campus.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:23)



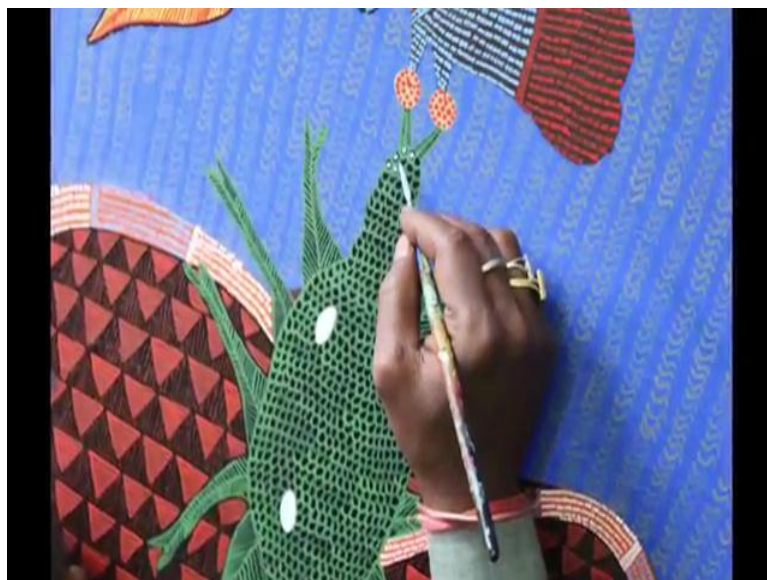
The story behind the iconography used which shall help us in understanding and appreciating the painting better goes like once everything in existence was water.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:36)



The gods they got bored of it they got bored of the non activity. So, they asked Badadev how can we take forms and live and have some adventures, Badadev said there is nothing. So, even if I make you alive where will you go? What will you do? So, Shiva or Badadev, he made some white birds and sent them to look for solid grounds or earth for eon, they searched, they found nothing and got tired. Flying Sheshnag or the divine snake was not in the ocean and so the birds in order to rest landed on him. He got angry and he let off his, which turns one of the birds black.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:36)



Another bird sat on a crab, whose name was Kekdamal. The crab asked I am never seen once such as you who are you they replied Badadev has sent us. So, this Kekdamal, he knew that earth was in underground earth was in earth was hidden underground. So, Kekdamal said that I will take you to Nandraja and Nandrani, who are a pair of earth forms and who are who are responsible for hiding the earth deep underground.

Nandraja and Nandrani, they said no, they said if you take earth what will we eat and they stood that ground even after lot of begging and pleading. So, the crab he took some earth out of the earth forms in mouth, molded it into 3 mounts and took it to Shiva, who then proceeded to make three worlds including earth from the mounts. Now, another date he had a problem with Shiva making earth so she took the form of a spider and started un making earth, Shiva had to specify her and then was finally, able to complete the job. So, Badadev then made earth and three worlds. So, this story as depicted in this painting that is repeated over and over as existence will get destroyed and will be remade again and again.

In conclusion, Gond art comes with a belief that a good image brings good luck. This inherit believe, led the Gonds to decorate their houses and floors with traditional tattoos and motives. Fortunately, Gond art has not escaped the eyes of art in the country even the Indian government is making efforts to preserve Gond paintings unlike so many treasures of Indian culture that have slip to the crakes of time and will lost forever. The future of Gond art looks as vibrant as color full as the paintings.

Thank you.